



## *Office of the State Fire Marshal*

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**CONTACT:**

Jacquelyn Reineke: (312) 485-8227

### **SEPTEMBER DESIGNATED CAMPUS FIRE SAFETY MONTH**

SPRINGFIELD – With over a million students returning to colleges and universities throughout Illinois, the Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal urges students to familiarize themselves with the risks of fire and the simple steps they can take to stay safe in on-campus and off-campus housing.

According to the Center for Campus Fire Safety, a nonprofit organization dedicated to raising awareness for fire safety issues at colleges and universities, August and September are the most common months for fatal campus-related housing fires. Many college students have not had proper fire safety education since elementary school. This frequently results in students overlooking the real dangers of fire. Nationally, 126 people have died from fires that occurred on a college campus, in Greek housing, or in off-campus housing within three miles of campus since 2000.

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), dormitory fires are more common in the evening hours between 5pm and 11pm, and on weekends. NFPA research indicates that cooking equipment is involved in more than five out of six of these dormitory fires.

Alcohol impairment can also contribute to fires and increase the severity of injury. Alcohol slows down reaction times and reduces coordination, therefore making it more difficult to escape once a fire has started. Students should avoid cooking, especially over open flames, when they have had too much to drink. Unsafe disposal of lit cigarettes is also a prominent cause of fire.

To enhance the ability for students to evacuate quickly and efficiently if there is a fire, students should avoid leaving large objects in hallways and in front of doors. They should also determine at least two ways to exit their building upon move-in.

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“The good news is that most fires, both on campus and off, are preventable,” said State Fire Marshal Matt Perez. “Knowing the risks and paying attention to what you are doing can go a long way in preventing a fire. Also, make sure to test your smoke detectors regularly in the unfortunate case something does happen. Being prepared is the difference between life or death.”

The 750,000 Illinois college students who live in off-campus housing should be especially vigilant, as 80 percent of campus housing fires take place off-campus.

The Office of the State Fire Marshal advises that students:

- Install UL-listed smoke alarms in every room of an apartment or rental home.
- Test smoke alarms monthly and replace batteries as needed.
- Look for housing that is equipped with automatic fire sprinkler systems. Not every building has them.
- Know two ways out of every building. A fire escape ladder can provide an alternate exit from second or third floor rooms.
- Properly dispose of smoking materials in ashtrays. After parties, check the cushions on couches and chairs for smoldering cigarettes.
- Purchase a fire extinguisher and learn how to use it before a fire breaks out.
- **Always notify the fire department before attempting to extinguish a fire on your own.**
- Use UL-listed extension cords and electrical appliances properly. Don't overload electrical outlets.
- If the residence has fossil-fuel burning appliances, such as a gas stove or furnace, install UL-listed carbon monoxide alarms on every floor and near sleeping areas.
- Never leave candles unattended and keep them away from items that could easily catch fire. Be sure to put out candles before going to bed.

Please visit [campusfiresafety.org](http://campusfiresafety.org), [nfpa.org](http://nfpa.org) or [sfm.illinois.gov](http://sfm.illinois.gov) for more information.

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